

THE STENCH OF GOOD NEWS

A STORY OF FAITH HOPE AND RESILIENCE



PIERRE KUMA



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Now, it's clear that Pierre is truly blessed. His survival is nothing short of a miracle.

—Rita Forson

You cheated death.

—Dr. Arnold Amissah-Aidoo

You have no business being here...

—Auntie Amaki

ENDORSEMENTS

“This book is unputdownable. It’s just brilliant. It’s required reading for medical staff and chock-full of lessons for everyone. God bless you. I fully endorse it.”

—Dr. Teddy Totimeh MBCHB MPhil FWACS FGCS

*Consultant Pediatric Neurosurgeon, Accra Medical Center;
Senior Lecturer, Accra College of Medicine, East Legon, Ghana;
Part-Time Senior Lecturer, University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho,
Volta Region, Ghana*

“In this thriller of a disastrous life event that most won’t survive to tell, nothing but Pierre’s faith-as-anchor must’ve kept him tethered, teetering between life and death for months. In this explosive page-turner, we see, hear, taste, feel, and yes, smell, a prophet from the dead who’s been to hell and back. Listen to him—and live.”

—Dr. (Med) Yaw Perbi

Inspirational Medical Doctor, Bestselling Author & Executive Coach

This uplifting story is about unusual courage in the face of overwhelming odds. It is a story of faith, hope, resilience and perseverance. It is sobering without being depressing. The writer’s optimism and his fighting spirit shines through every page, as does his sense of profound gratitude for the gift of life.

—Rev. Agnes Phillips

*Retired Reverend Minister, Legon interdenominational Church, Accra,
Ghana*

Never in the long history of my practice in medicine and surgery—almost six decades—have I been given such vivid feedback on what a burnt patient goes through.

From the time of the incident till he recovers from his injuries and returns to normalcy in society: time spent in the ICU; his breathing taken over by a ventilator; extubated and returned to the main surgical ward, where multiple dressings are done, to be followed by skin grafting. He pours out his experience, literally dissecting the health system of the country.

The ever-present smell or stench of wounds; the pain during or after wound dressing, operation, or while undergoing physiotherapy; these should be of concern to the health practitioner.

His strong faith in religion seems to have contributed to his full recovery—not forgetting his positive attitude to life.

Healthcare practitioners—nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists: nobody is exempted—should read this account.

**—Mr. Anthony George Laing MBCHB FRCS(England)
FWACS FGCPS**

*Senior Consultant Plastic Surgeon, Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, Accra,
Ghana*

DEDICATION

To all those who need to hear this story—may it offer hope, healing, and strength.

To my beloved mother, **Madam Naomi Kotey**, who gave her all—not just so I could survive, but so I could live fully again and tell this story.

In loving memory of my grandmothers, who both departed this life in 2020:

**Madam Augustina Sarah Lamiorkor Lawson and Madam Anna
Quaidoo**

And in cherished memory of my dear friend, **Mrs. Lorraine Afosah-Nyarko**, whose passing the previous year was a profound loss.

May your legacies continue to inspire, and your memories remain a guiding light.

PREFACE

August 11, 2020, began normally. But by day's end, my body was on fire and my life forever changed. The odds of survival were staggeringly low—so low, in fact, that it felt as if only a few of my fingers were anchored in this world while the rest of me teetered on the brink of the next. I was slipping away, caught in a perilous balance between life and death.

Burn injuries are among the most excruciating and devastating traumas the human body can endure. According to the Lund and Browder chart—a critical medical tool for assessing burn severity—burns covering more than twenty percent of the body's surface area are considered severe and life-threatening. With thirty-nine percent of my body—both feet to knees, both arms from fingers to short-sleeve level, neck, face, and scalp—charred down to raw, exposed flesh, my chances of survival seemed impossibly slim. The pain was relentless. Nearly half of my body was covered in superficial and deep second-degree burns that pierced me with a mix of indescribable agony.

Worse still, I had inhaled hot, nauseating gases, causing burns to my airway that turned each breath into a struggle against suffocation. But the burns were only part of the threat. My body constantly fought against organ failure, infection, and shock. Every moment was a battle to stay alive.

The exceptional medical care I received was nothing short of critical. But the unwavering support from my family, friends, and loved ones—spiritual, emotional, psychological, and material—played an equally vital role in my survival and recovery.

Now, five years later, I'm still here—fully recovered, fit, and writing this book. Remarkably, many people wouldn't even realize I had been in such a devastating accident unless I pointed out the scars on my hands. In 2022, someone mistook the marks on the backs of my hands for vitiligo after noticing the healing, blotchy skin. This still happens, the most recent instance occurring on March 1 of this year. I've had to show photos to explain that I survived a catastrophic fire accident. My demeanor and positive spirit don't betray the trauma I endured. Only the scars remain—a silent witness to the ordeal I survived.

As a person of faith, I'm convinced my survival was no coincidence. It simply wasn't my time to leave this world. God's will kept me here, guiding me back from the edge because my purpose had not yet been fulfilled. My

story wasn't meant to end there. It continues—a testament to grace, resilience, faith, and the unyielding will to live.

I am fully convinced that my survival and experience are stories the world needs to hear. This book is my way of honoring the profound work God has done in my life. It's a heartfelt expression of gratitude—to Him, and to all who became instruments of His incomparable power. This is not a book of lessons, theories, or arguments. It's simply my story. A story of hope meant to lift spirits and encourage anyone who may be struggling, reminding them that God is always able. He can and will act in accordance with the purpose of His will.

My hope is that these words will bring comfort and encouragement to all who read or hear this account. Truly, there is no depth too great for God to reach, no situation so hopeless that He cannot turn it around.

Except for a few Bible verses and one quote, I've intentionally avoided referencing other material. I wanted the narrative to flow naturally, driven by the raw events and personal reflection. This approach allows you, the reader, to draw your own conclusions, make your own notes, and find personal meaning as the story unfolds.

This book is divided into four main sections:

Before the Fire – My Story Begins

This section provides background information about my life prior to the accident. While some details may seem unrelated at first, they offer essential context that helps the reader better understand and appreciate the story that follows.

Part I – How It All Started

This part recounts the day of the accident: how it happened, how I got to the hospital, and how that day ended. It begins with my personal recollections, then shifts to the perspectives of key people who were present—my neighbor, my mother, and my cousin. Their accounts help fill in the gaps in my memory and offer a more complete picture of events.

Part II – The Journey

Here, I describe my recovery process from the day after the accident to full recovery. This includes key moments from my hospital stay, my time at home after discharge, and the gradual return to health. My mother's perspective is also included to provide a fuller view of the experience.

Part III – The Aftermath

This final section offers my reflections on the accident and its lasting impact on my life—mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially.

A friend and former colleague, **Adilson Paulo**, once said to me:

“The scar is a sign that it happened. With time, you heal, and most of the signs will fade, taking away the gravity of the event. But the scars remain as proof that it happened. It’s like receiving a certificate after completing a course.”

BEFORE THE FIRE: MY STORY BEGINS

In July 2019, I moved into a new apartment, marking the beginning of a fresh chapter in my life. I had been working steadily in the oil and gas industry for over a year, though in a different sector—subsea services—despite having a background in drilling. The transition came with minimal training, but I was determined to rebuild my career after the global industry downturn.

I had found my footing in a company where I was beginning to thrive. There was a growing sense of optimism in the air. The phrase “recovery in sight” had become a common refrain, often emblazoned on company PowerPoint slides—a hopeful sign of the industry’s gradual return to stability.

On a personal level, I was experiencing a powerful drive toward self-

improvement. I immersed myself in self-help books, carefully taking notes that guided my development. I was investing not only in my career, but just as much in my personal and spiritual growth.

Spiritually, I was growing deeper in my relationship with the Lord. I prayed more, studied the Bible regularly, and found that the solitude of the COVID-19 lockdown gave me even more time for reflection and communion with God. During this season, I gained a clearer sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of my place in the world.

I was also being mentored in my walk with God. One session during the pandemic stood out: my mentor shared something that has stayed with me ever since. He said, “A regular Christian should have the habit of reading about ten chapters of the Bible daily—reading, not studying.” It was advice he had once received himself, and it resonated deeply. At that point, I was already spending a significant part of my day in Scripture, prayer, and quiet reflection—so much so that I sometimes had to cut it short just to begin work on time.

Alongside my spiritual journey, I continued my commitment to personal development. One impactful book I read was *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect* by John C. Maxwell. I took online courses in leadership, coaching, and interpersonal relations—lessons on how to win friends, influence people, and lead effectively. Each day, I nurtured both personal and professional growth.

In January 2020, while I was offshore, I received heartbreaking news: my maternal grandmother had passed away. Just days before, I had visited her on a quiet Sunday afternoon. Deep down, I sensed it might be the last time. That evening, I boarded a flight to Angola, holding onto the hope that I would return to find her still alive. But life had other plans.

Though she was of advanced age, my grandmother’s death deeply affected me. Losing a loved one is never easy, no matter how old they are. However, I found solace in knowing she was in a better place. She wasn’t just my grandmother; she was my childhood best friend. Despite a sixty-four-year age difference, we shared a bond that transcended generations. She played a pivotal role in raising me, along with thirteen of her direct grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Her final burial rites were completed just days before COVID-19 was

declared a global pandemic. In line with Ghanaian custom, my mother and her siblings were assigned a new maternal figure—my grandmother’s cousin—who theoretically became my grandmother. Tragically, she also passed away just a few months into the lockdown, leaving me no time to form a meaningful relationship with her.

As if the weight of losing two grandmothers in such quick succession wasn’t enough, another grandmother figure in my life, affectionately known as “Grandma” by my friends and me, also passed away during this tumultuous period. She was the biological grandmother of one of my university friends, who embraced all of us as if we were her own grandchildren. Her warmth and kindness made her home feel like ours, and she treated us with love that transcended bloodlines.

Unfortunately, I hadn’t seen Grandma for eleven years since my graduation, too focused on building my career to maintain that connection. In 2019, I finally realized my mistake. I began planning—at least mentally—to make amends. I wanted to pay her a surprise visit at her home in Tarkwa, in the Western Region of Ghana, the town where I attended university. I took the small but significant step of getting her phone number from a friend who had reminded me of my moral duty to stay in touch with her.

Sadly, work intervened again, deferring my plan to visit once more. Then, in July 2020, during the partial lockdown, I received devastating news: Grandma had passed away. I wasn’t only crushed by her death, but also by the realization that I never made that visit. The regret of neglecting her all those years, the guilt of postponing my visit when I finally decided to reach out, and the sorrow of losing a third grandmother figure within six months weighed heavily on my heart and forced me to re-evaluate how I managed important relationships in my life.

I knew I had to move past these feelings somehow—and at the very least, attend her funeral. I wouldn’t by any means be the first person to experience such a loss, but I couldn’t help wondering why we often try to assuage our guilt by attending the funeral, as if that could somehow make up for years of missed opportunities to show love and care while the person was still alive.

Determined to honor her memory, two friends and I—all adopted

grandchildren—decided to travel to Tarkwa for her one-week celebration, a day set aside by some ethnic groups in Ghana to commemorate and honor the life of the deceased, usually marked by finalizing key decisions for the funeral rites.

We set off from Accra on the morning of Saturday, August 8, 2020, for a road trip to Tarkwa, arriving in the afternoon for the one-week celebration. There, we spent time with the extended family—catching up, offering our support, and fulfilling our roles as adopted grandsons by making individual donations. Anticipating that Grandma's family house would be busy with activities, we returned that evening to spend the night in Takoradi, a major city and the Western Regional capital on our route back to Accra, where we had pre-booked an Airbnb. Early Sunday morning, we set off for Accra.

After about five hours of driving, we arrived in Accra and stopped by my mother's house to drop off foodstuffs I had picked up for her during the trip. In return, she handed me a container of frozen okra stew—one of my favorite dishes.

Later that week, I decided to have some of that okra stew for lunch—without an inkling that this simple decision would mark the beginning of a life-altering journey that would almost end my life. What I thought was just a regular meal would soon become the starting point of an unforeseen and unwanted harrowing marathon I never imagined running.